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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 6056
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 9649
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RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 3063
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0355
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 2010
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4893
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 9762
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 0162
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 7532
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 3915
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 002067

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KWMN](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: BIOGRAPHY: RAJASTHAN CHIEF MINISTER VASUNDHARA RAJE

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Classified By: PolCouns Ted Osius for reasons 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (C) On an April 10-14 trip to Rajasthan, PolOff met with politicians, journalists, NGOs, and academicians to get a fix on the current state of affairs. This cable is largely derived from conversations during this trip about Chief Minister (CM) Vasundhara Raje.

A POLITICAL MAHARANI

¶2. (C) A member of the royal Scindia family from the neighboring state of Madhya Pradesh, Raje is a "Maharani" in her own right, who took to politics after India's princely families were stripped of their power by the India government. The Scindia family is very active in politics, with members in both the BJP and Congress. Raje's mother initiated her into politics in 1984 and she won a seat in the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly in 1985. In 1989, Raje won the Lok Sabha seat representing the Jhalawar district, where she served for five terms until 2003. She is close to both former Prime Minister (PM) Atul Bihari Vajpayee and former Home Minister L.K. Advani and held a variety of posts in the Vajpayee government, the most notable being Minister of State for External Affairs. Raje is a political moderate and advocates strong relations between India and the United States. CM Raje assumed her current position on December 8, ¶2003. In the 2004 elections, her son, Dushyant Singh was elected to the the Lok Sabha from the Jhalawar district.

A CHIEF MINISTER OF A DIFFERENT CLASS

13. (C) On April 11, PolOff met Special Correspondent for India Today, Rohit Parihar, who spoke at length about the Chief Minister. Raje is the third CM Parihar has covered and he readily admits she is corrupt, describing the other CM,s as &holy cows compared to her. However, Parihar asserts, Raje is also extremely eloquent and full of innovative ideas, though some are too cutting-edge for conservative Rajasthan. Compliments about Raje flowed from Parihar: well-educated by nuns at a "convent school", she speaks excellent English, and is extremely charming, articulate and dynamic. Parihar described Raje as belonging to a &different class.8

14. (C) Although married, Raje has been separated from her husband for years. Before moving to Jaipur as CM, she was a regular on the Delhi party circuit, and her romantic liaisons were common knowledge. She has renovated the CM's residence with Italian marble throughout -- although she claims someone donated it to her. She does not fly in old planes, but in helicopters, asserting that she has a fear of old planes after her brother died in a plane crash. Since moving to Jaipur, she has largely severed her ties to her "fast" Delhi social circle, claiming it as a "sacrifice" to maintain her image as CM. She no longer drinks in the evenings and diligently wakes up every day at 0500 to pray before coming to work, say our contacts.

NOT AFRAID OF THE MORE RADICAL ELEMENTS OF HER PARTY

15. (C) Raje belongs to the Hindu nationalist BJP and is a very devout Hindu (she maintains an elaborate personal temple in the CM's residence with her own personal Brahmin priest

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and travels frequently on pilgrimages to temples in remote areas of Rajasthan, often staying alone for days at a time immersed in prayer and meditation). However, she does not live by the austere philosophy preached by the RSS) the right-wing Hindu group which forms the backbone of the BJP -- and is more cosmopolitan than traditional Rajasthan.

16. (C) Raje,s relationship with the RSS is strained, as she is not &communal.8 She told Embassy that she attended a convent school throughout her childhood, including regular church services and is very comfortable with Christians and Christianity. At the same time, she has publicly pilloried Christian missionaries who distribute scurrilous literature throughout Rajasthan attacking the Hindu faith, saying "ours is a peaceful state, and I will not allow such activities in Rajasthan." Outspoken in her criticism of the RSS, she does not fear it or succumb its often outrageous demands for the "Hinduization" of Rajasthani society.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

17. (C) Raje has not surrounded herself with good advisors. Parihar described them as more interested in their own careers than providing sound advice. Parihar asserted that they will not hesitate to stab her in the back or watch her fall for their own advantage. Despite her royal pedigree, Raje has earned the respect of many reporters and politicians for creating a more collegial atmosphere in government. Contacts from Jaipur to Udaipur, praised the closing session &field trip8 she sponsors for reporters covering the Legislative Assembly and the MLAs to watch a movie together.

18. (C) On April 14, PolOff met with Girija Vyas, current Chairperson of the National Commission for Women (and rumored to be the leading contender to become Rajasthan Chief Minister should Congress return to power). Vyas assessed Raje as &more propaganda than progress.8 Noting her good traits as &vision and access to money,8 Vyas asserted Raje,s bad traits are more numerous, including arrogance,

corruption, and surrounding herself with bad advisors. According to Vyas, Raje sought advice on how to improve her image, after which she stopped drinking publicly in the evenings, began praying at 0500 and getting to work by 0700 instead of her normal 1000. Vyas further commented that even if Raje has a vision to move Rajasthan into the future, her advisors are either not quick or supportive enough to allow it to happen. Vyas admitted that Raje has done "some good work," including the implementation of gender budgeting (Note: this refers to a federally mandated policy to allocate a percentage of departmental budgets to programs for women and girls. End Note).

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

19. (C) Born on March 8, 1953 in Mumbai, Raje earned a BS in political science and economics from Sophia College, Mumbai University. Separated from her husband, Hemant Singh, the former ruler of Dholpur in Rajasthan, the couple has one son, Dushyant Singh. Raje enjoys reading, listening to music, gardening, and fashion. We know from personal experience that she is proud and has a temper.
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